

# Breathing exercises to support speech

## A patient's advice sheet

### How can this information help me?

These exercises can help in two ways. They can provide greater respiratory support and help you to relax in situations that you may be finding difficult and that are affecting your speech.

### Breathing exercises

A good pattern of breathing is needed to produce an effective voice. This involves using the diaphragm, a sheet of muscle found at the bottom of the rib cage, which allows the lungs to expand fully.

These exercises will help you to improve your breathing technique.

- Ensure you are as relaxed as possible before starting your breathing exercises.
- Always take your breathing exercises gently, pausing between sections. If you start to feel dizzy, rest for a minute or two and then try again.
- Allow yourself enough time to complete the exercises so that you do not rush them.
- These exercises should be enjoyable, relaxing and help you to spend more time slowing yourself down and feeling calm.

1. Lying on the floor or bed, or sitting well-supported in a chair, rest your hand on your stomach/diaphragm (the area just above your waist) and be aware of the gentle inwards and outwards movement as you breathe.

a) If seated you can use a mirror to monitor the movement and give yourself feedback. If lying down place a light book on your stomach to give you more feedback on where

the breath is coming from.

b) Gradually exaggerate the 'out' breath. Squeeze the air out, using your stomach muscles, and then let the air naturally fill your lungs again as you breathe back in. Monitor the movement of your stomach/diaphragm as you do this - with the out breath your stomach/diaphragm moves inwards, as you breathe in the area moves out and expands.

c) Use your hands to monitor the range of movement in your lower back as well as your stomach. Make sure there is only minimal movement in your upper chest and shoulders.

d) As you become used to this breathing pattern, take deeper breaths. You should feel the lungs filling more and more and then emptying completely.

2. Sit in a relaxed but upright position, with your back supported.

a) Relax your shoulders.

b) Rest your arms on the arms of the chair or by your side (ensure they are not held tightly against your ribcage).

c) Using small breaths only, breathe in a relaxed and even pattern.

d) Next, breathe in slowly for three seconds, pause briefly and then breathe out for three seconds. During these movements feel the bottom of your ribcage and stomach move out as you breathe in, and then back in again as you breathe out.

e) Return to your natural breathing pattern and relax.

f) Repeat this exercise four times, always breathing in for three seconds, pausing, and

breathing out for three seconds. Return to your natural breathing in-between exercises.

Once you have established the correct pattern of breathing through the exercises above you can move on to the following exercises that focus on controlling the breath.

3. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, gently and easily, until a smooth and relaxed rhythm has been established.

a) Begin a silent count, breathing in for three seconds and out for three seconds.

b) Maintain this silent count for several attempts and then begin to vary the length of the 'in' and 'out' breaths.

c) Then try to vary this - breathing in for a count of two and out for a count of four.

4. As this becomes easier, decrease the 'in' breath time and increase the 'out' breath count as this mirrors our pattern of breathing for speech more closely.

a) Breathe in on a count of two and out on a count of five.

b) Next breathe in on a count of two again but then breathe out on 'sssss' (hissing sound) for a count of five.

5. Make sure that you do not allow any tension to occur in your lips, tongue, throat or neck while making the 's' sound. If you do feel tension building up go back to silent breathing and then try again once you have relaxed.

a) Breathe in for a count of two and out for as

long as you can on 'sssss'.

b) Keep a note of this time and try to extend it. Do not force the sound out, and stop if you feel any tension, particularly in your throat, jaw and shoulders.

6. Now you are going to use breath control to vary the intensity of sound.

a) Begin again by breathing in for a count of two and breathing out on the 's'. This time pull in your stomach muscles to make the sound grow in volume, for example

**sssssssss.**

b) Repeat this exercise but let the sound decrease as time goes on for, example

**SSSSSSss.**

c) Repeat again and this time have the period of greatest intensity/volume in the middle of your out breath, for example sssSSSsss.

d) Finally try to alternate between periods of greater and lesser intensity (loud and soft sounds), for example sSsSsSs.

7. Repeat exercises 4-6 using the sounds 'sh' and 'f' instead of 's'.

**If you have any questions, please contact  
Speech & Language Therapy on 01480 364732.**